DP/2006/CRP.2
DP/FPA/2006/CRP.1

Distr.: General
22 December 2005

Original: English

First regular session 2006
20 to 27 January 2006, New York
Item 11 of the provisional agenda
Programming process

Cost-efficient approaches to providing programme-level data*

1. Background

1. At the annual session of the Executive Board, in June 2005, the Executive Board requested in decision 2005/30 that UNDP and UNFPA "make a proposal at the first regular session of the Executive Board in 2006 on cost-efficient approaches to providing programme-level data to their respective Boards as part of their programming and reporting cycles".

2. The Board acknowledged the substantial progress made by both organizations in reporting on results through the multi-year funding framework (MYFF). The Board noted the improvements made in terms of strategic focus and the responsiveness of programmes to the demands and priorities of countries. The Board also expressed interest in receiving more information on programme performance and the contribution of programmes to national development outcomes.

3. This joint conference room paper presents the combined perspectives of UNDP and UNFPA. The paper discusses the respective reporting systems and elaborates on issues and challenges that the organizations confront in presenting programme-level data at this particular juncture. It also discusses the United Nations harmonization and simplification process and the new international aid effectiveness principles. It highlights a potential divergence between these processes and the request of the Board that organization-specific programme-level data be made available to Board members. The paper concludes by presenting cost-effective approaches to sharing programme-level data using the current MYFF reporting process.

*The compilation of data required to provide the Executive Board with the most current information has delayed submission of the present document.

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II. Current reporting systems and content

4. UNDP and UNFPA maintain individual MYFF-based reporting arrangements which differ from each other in several important respects. For example, the UNDP reporting arrangements are based on a conceptual distinction between the achievements of UNDP per se in a programme country, and the achievements of the programme country itself. In the UNFPA approach, reporting on the MYFF interprets country performance using a set of development results associated with the mandate of the organization. Additionally, there are significant differences in the data systems that each organization has put in place for reporting.

5. The UNDP MYFF was introduced in 2000 as a critical tool to articulate and sharpen the priorities of the organization and to develop means of achieving its objectives within programming cycles. It is the most comprehensive report on the performance of UNDP, aggregating data from over 140 programme countries and reporting on performance in all the practice areas. The MYFF also provides a succinct analysis of the efficiency with which UNDP financial resources have been used.

6. The MYFF provides important and useful data on progress towards achieving organizational objectives. Generally speaking, a new set of principles and good practices is emerging as agencies work towards a shift to country strategies and programmes. This process is complex and requires a number of institutional changes in UNDP. The consultative process planned under the so-called road map[1] will to a large extent address this issue.

7. The UNFPA MYFF was also introduced in 2000. The second MYFF, which is currently under implementation, defines UNFPA contributions to development results, indicates how progress will be measured and identifies the strategies to be used to attain results. The MYFF report presents information on about 120 programme countries, highlighting progress made to achieve national population and development objectives. It also indicates how UNFPA has contributed in particular areas of its mandate to support national partners and presents a set of robust indicators on UNFPA organizational effectiveness.

III. Issues and challenges to presenting programme-level data

Self-reported versus independently verified information

8. In both organizations, MYFF reporting has essentially been built on self-reported data from country offices. In the case of UNFPA, however, it also incorporates data provided by national implementing agencies. Members of the Board and some donors have, in the past, highlighted the fact that the data should therefore not be relied on to provide accurate, objective perspectives on UNFPA performance. In accepting this suggestion, UNDP and UNFPA have taken a number of steps to improve the quality and integrity of its data.

9. In the case of UNDP, the information provided by country offices is now subject to audits in addition to regional bureau oversight. Moreover, the number of

[1] Time line for the preparation of the end-of-cycle assessment of performance (2004-2007), DP/2006/3

assessments of development results (ADRs) undertaken annually is increasing. The ADRs provide a rigorous, evidence-based assessment of programme outcomes and impact at the country level. In addition to these measures, substantial investments are being made to strengthen the capacity of the organization in the area of results-based management. The current 'PRINCE 2' and 'CEDAR[2]' training and certification exercises involving all staff are key components of this capacity-building effort.

10. UNFPA has revised its guidelines and formats for annual reporting to make them more results oriented. It has also introduced several mechanisms to validate the information provided by country offices, including a closer review of country office reports by regional divisions and further analysis in the Programme Committee. There are plans to include an assessment of the quality of information provided in country office reports as part of the audit exercise. UNFPA has conducted training at the regional level to improve the results-based programme planning, monitoring and evaluation practices that are the basis of meaningful results reporting. UNFPA headquarters has just concluded a meta-evaluation to assess and improve the quality of evaluations, which are increasingly conducted by country offices to assess programme performance and the achievement of results.

11. The initiatives undertaken by UNDP and UNFPA are expected to result in greater standardization and better-quality data to assess country programme performance. However, both organizations consider that it is at present not possible to share share-programme level data with Board members, given the additional investment in efforts and resources that would be required to validate and process the information. UNFPA has the added complication that some of the reported data is provided by the national institutions implementing the country programmes, which provide programme performance information without being aware that it will be shared with a wider audience and will be subject to specific scrutiny.

MYFF reporting cycles versus impact time frames

12. Another important issue is that a proper assessment of programme performance and impact cannot be made annually, since it takes more than a year for progress and results to become apparent. The MYFF reports reflect the annual achievements of country programmes towards meeting their specific annual targets, but they do not present evidence of impact, which occurs over a longer time span – in some cases even beyond the duration of the country programme. Therefore, useful information on programme-level performance and impact is best provided and captured by assessments and evaluations at the end of programme cycles, with the full participation of the respective Government.

13. In view of that fact, both organizations recognize that evidence-based data on performance and organizational results for individual country programmes are likewise best provided at the end of the programme cycle, prior to submitting new country programmes for approval by the Board.

[2] Capacity for Efficient Delivery of Achievable Results project

IV. United Nations reform and harmonized reporting

14. Against the backdrop of current United Nations reform measures, and the growing momentum towards harmonizing and integrating programming in support of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and national development plans and Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers that integrate the MDGs, the Executive Board needs to consider whether it wishes to pursue requests for individual agencies to provide programme-level data at this time.

15. Following the principles of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, the United Nations Development Group is guiding United Nations country teams in the direction of integrated and results-based UNDAFs, monitoring and evaluation, and reporting mechanisms that reflect the collective contribution of United Nations organizations to national development outcomes at the country level.

16. The follow-up to the World Summit outcome document requires coordinated action by United Nations country teams to build national capacity; to incorporate the internationally-agreed development goals, including the MDGs, as critical outcomes of national development strategies; to translate them into concrete programmes and interventions; and to follow up on their implementation.

V. Recommendations

17. As noted earlier, UNDP and UNFPA have different MYFF structures and somewhat diverse systems and practices for gathering, analysing and reporting programme-related information. For this reason, cost-effective approaches to sharing programme level data must be agency-specific. UNDP and UNFPA have also identified a common opportunity for making available more specific programme information at the time of the country programme approval.

UNDP-specific approaches

18. While the scope for provision of data in terms of the 2005 MYFF will present some limitations, initial pilot assessments of programme level data could be considered for specific categories of countries in accordance with criteria agreed to by the Board – for example countries of particular attention vis-à-vis achievement of the MDGs[3] and/or countries where the Paris Declaration follow-up offers most opportunities for learning. Feedback from such an initiative could provide important input into the above-mentioned road map consultations.

19. Alternatively, the groundwork can be laid for the development of some programme level reporting system for the 2004-2007 cumulative report for countries that could be of special interest to the Board, such as least developed countries (LDCs), landlocked countries (LLCs) or fragile countries.

UNFPA-specific approaches

20. Given the scope of the MYFF, that reflects UNFPA partnerships in support of the broader national development frameworks, and the type of data collected, which basically describe country development performance, further guidance from the Board will be necessary to better define the programme-level data that is being

[3] e.g., the Millennium Project pilot countries.

requested. In the light of the new principles of aid effectiveness, as reflected in the Paris Declaration, that emphasize on country ownership for development results, it would be necessary to agree with the programme countries what information UNFPA would be able to share. With regard to agency programme performance, although the UNFPA MYFF (unlike the UNDP MYFF) was not built to assess organizational results,the formulation of the next MYFF would provide an opportunity to reflect these information requirements.

21. In addition to the common approach presented in paragraph 22, below, the MYFF cumulative report, due in June 2007, presents the only cost-effective opportunity currently in place within UNFPA to provide more information on programme performance for achieving development results for categories or groups4 of countries of special interest to the Board (LDCs, LLCs or fragile countries).

Approaches for both agencies

22. The current process for the approval of new country programmes provides for sharing country-specific programme-level data with the Board as part of the assessment of the previous country programme performance. Since information requirements may evolve over time, particularly with the furthering of United Nations joint programming, UNDP and UNFPA would maintain periodic consultations with the Board to review these requirements and address any additional information needs that may emerge in the future.

23. Since UNDP and UNFPA are currently preparing to submit new MYFFs to the Executive Board in September 2007, there is an opportunity to review the focus and structure of these strategic documents to ensure that they fully conform to the emerging role of the United Nations development organizations in the context of United Nations reform and the new development architecture. The development of the new MYFFs will be open, transparent and consultative with all Executive Board members, providing a unique opportunity to address the needs of all members in a consistent manner.

[4] For the reasons indicated in paragraphs 11and 13, it will not be possible to share individual country programme level data.